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ABSTRACT

It was theorized that successes and limitations of curricular improvement projects should provide cues for intelligent planning of subsequent curricular change. The authors reviewed the records kept at the East Central Indiana Curriculum Improvement Project Office. They interviewed those in policy making and administrative positions with the Project. They sent questionnaires to the principals, teachers, and pupils in the 13 schools involved in the Project. This data was examined with primary reference to the ideas of cultural change as presented in Felix Keesing's "Cultural Anthropology: The Science of Customs". An operational theory of change was observed. An attempt was made to identify the sources of ideas and the reasons for participation. A change in attitude toward curricular change was noted as a side-effect of the Project's activities. A short bibliography is appended. (JY)

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AN EVALUATION OF CURRICULUM PROJECTS AS CUES TO CURRICULAR CHANGE

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Introduction to the Study

Quality curriculum evaluation must contribute to an intelligent combining of theories of instruction. In designing this study it was theorized that successes and limitations of curricular improvement projects should provide cues for intelligent planning of subsequent curricular change. From research and literature in sociology, political science, anthropology, education, as well as theories of planned change were identified and used as bases for hypotheses in the research design. The evaluation attempted to identify project components that could be attributed to or accompany curriculum change.

Evaluation in education is a topic that generates much controversy and little agreement - witness the furor connected with National Assessment, and with Coleman's evaluation in Equality of Educational Opportunity.[1] The study reported here was no exception. This was particularly noticeable during the negotiation for the final year of the East Central Indiana Curriculum Improvement Project,* a Title III project under Public Law 89-10, the evaluation as examined in this paper was both descriptive of the purposes and activities of the project and a collection of several persons' judgments on how well the activities met the purposes, both of which generated controversy.

At the conceptual level, the three-year project was seen as a unique cooperative relationship between a University whose major function has been

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* The East Central Curriculum Improvement Project was many different sub-projects, each aimed at distinct purposes and activities to alter or modify the existing curriculum in thirteen Indiana districts operating in over 100 school buildings and employing over 110 administrators, a population of 1,100 teachers and serving better than 30,000 pupils. Not only was the number of professional personnel large, but there was the fifteen to thirty percent year-to-year turnover in positions at all levels of responsibility.

teacher education and 13 school districts who were interested in operating the best possible schools. The original conceptualization hoped to exploit the possibilities of the role of "clinical professor," drawing largely on the resources of Ball State University with its tradition of teacher education.

Specifics of Design of the Evaluation

The first step in the evaluation was to review the records kept in the Project Office. Those engaged in the evaluation looked at the budget and examined the allocation of resources. They obtained lists of the personnel and examined the professional reports that were available. They read descriptions of sub-projects which included: their purposes, the population served, the time and instructional materials that had been utilized, and the evaluative and descriptive data that had been collected. And finally, in the Project Director's office, the authors of the evaluation obtained descriptions of other services in the area of administration, dissemination, and evaluation provided by that office.

Based on the knowledge obtained in the Project Director's office, structured interview guides were developed for use with those in policy making and administrative positions with the project. Interviewed, with appropriate schedules (See Appendix), were: a) the Project Director, b) the professional staff from the Project Director's office that were directly responsible for specific sub-projects, and c) the administrators of the 13 schools that were served by the Project.

From the data obtained in the first two steps, a questionnaire was prepared to be administered to principals and teachers who were directly involved in one of the sub-projects or its activities. (See Appendix). A second set of questionnaires were also developed based on the questionnaires

utilized in the Preliminary Curriculum Assessment (an earlier assessment conducted in 1966 in order to identify the curricular needs of the 13 school systems) with administrators, teachers, and pupils in grades 4 through 12. These three questionnaires obtained data that parallel the data obtained in the Preliminary Assessment but contained additional items intending to measure changes that might have resulted from participation in the Curriculum Improvement Project or any of the sub-projects.

With Reference to Some Hypotheses

As a preliminary to the development of the evaluation of the East Central Curricular Improvement project, it was necessary to examine literature regarding planned change. It was the intent that certain conceptual hypotheses might emerge from this examination. Standard works in the field of change were examined. Included in this survey was the work of Keesing,[2] Cartwright,[3] Zetterburg,[4] Bennie,[5] and Watson.[6] Felix Keesing offered some relevant insight in his "The Rules of the Game" found in Cultural Anthropology: The Science of Customs.

Keesing's work offered general concepts to be examined in the over-all design of the study as here reported. He offered that:

> "The values which people themselves put upon cultural elements are what count in acceptance or rejection of proposed innovation, not their worth in the eyes of the donor group.
>
> "Where major changes are sought, a total frontal effort of community development or child-adult education is more effective and less disrupting and disorganizing than piecemeal presentation of single innovations.
>
> "Training indigenous persons to assume leadership and new skills and ideas is essential. An outside "expert" can do little more than provide "models" which people themselves have to work into shape of their culture. Participation is essential."

These concepts seemed appropriate for over-riding general hypotheses

to be used in this study. As the research design developed, specific hypotheses emerged; however, the data were gathered with the primary reference being some of Keesing's ideas of cultural change.

Topics On Which Data Were Collected

In all steps, data were to be collected on: a) the general purposes of the Project, B) the specific purposes of the sub-projects, and c) roles played by the several persons who affected the purposes of the Project. These persons specifically included: a) the Project Director, b) the professional personnel in the Project Director's office, c) the school administrators, d) teachers, e) pupils, f) resource persons, g) local school boards, and h) lay people and patrons.

The evaluators hoped to locate: a) the possible sources of Project and sub-project ideas, b) the reasons for participation or non-participation in particular sub-projects, c) the descriptions of the pupil populations served, d) the influence of the sub-projects on the persons not directly involved, e) the expected persistent influence of the total Project, and f) the perceived changes resulting from the overall Project and the sub-projects.

Personnel of the Evaluation

The design, the collection of data, and the final writing of the evaluation report are the work of four persons from Ball State University.* To broaden the professional involvement in the evaluation, the services of Robert L. Ebel, professor at Michigan State University, and nationally known

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* James H. McElhinney and Richard C. Kunkel had assumed much of the responsibility for the design of the Preliminary Curriculum Assessment utilized by the Project in 1966. Serving as colleagues were Larry Lucas and Ed Merryman, who also work at curriculum evaluation and have other responsibilities at Ball State University.

authority in evaluations were secured. Due to the distance from the project and the press of other commitments, Dr. Ebel did not become directly involved in the collection of the data nor the written summary, but the design and the instruments used were submitted for his evaluation. Dr. Ebel received and reviewed the evaluation design and provided reactions to the data collection instruments.

The Project Studied

The overall Curriculum Project was directed by a board of control of the 13 school superintendents and was administered by a Project Director. The Project Director administered a staff of full and part-time professional personnel and full and part-time office personnel.

Major sub-projects that were evaluated for components of curriculum change covered a wide continuum of subject areas, age levels, and methodological approaches. Some of the major sub-projects were; reading workshops (focus on reading), oral-aural visual language arts instruction, high motivation general math program, inquiry elementary science program, art projects, social studies programs, individualized reading in secondary schools, individualized reading in elementary schools, paper-back bookshelves in subject matter classrooms, and team-teaching in language arts and social studies.

Data were gathered on each sub-project as well as on the direct relationship and perceptions of each of the 13 school superintendents with reference to the overall project and to sub-projects operating in his respective district.

Data From Teachers

Over 1,000 teachers in the thirteen participating districts completed a questionnaire whose major purpose was to provide data for the use of individual districts, but some of the data had implications for the overall

Project and those findings are reported here.

It was the original goal of the Project to touch approximately one-fourth of the teachers and the Teacher Questionnaire indicated that approximately 25 percent were aware of the Project's activities. About 15 percent of the teachers identified activities in their buildings as related to sub-projects activities and another 15 percent identified innovative activities but did not connect them with sub-projects. Teachers did not identify themselves as sources of sub-project ideas. About one-fourth of all teacher responses indicated that they saw colleagues who were involved as being enthusiastic about the project. The other 75% indicated that they could not answer the question regarding enthusiasm of their colleagues. When asked to identify ways instruction in their building had changed in the past two years, one-fourth of the teachers indicated that they thought all their programs had changed. However, nearly two-thirds of the teachers indicated that during the past two years they did not see any general changes in their school.

Nearly 50% of the teachers felt that the availability of instructional equipment and materials improved somewhat during the Project years, and a like number judged that emphasis placed on improving instruction in their district also increased.

Approximately 25% of the teachers indicated that they felt classroom supervision had increased somewhat, and another 50% of the teachers indicated that supervision stayed about the same. With reference to released time for the improvement of instruction, half of the teachers indicated that this had changed over the past two or three years.

Nearly 50% of the teachers held that the reading emphasis stayed the same, and roughly 25% saw it as increasing somewhat.

The general teacher questionnaires provide some data for evaluation of the

overall impact of the sub-projects. At the close of the three-year Project about one-fifth of the teachers were aware of its existence. Most of those aware judged that the Project had made a difference but were vague about specifics.

Cues to Curriculum Change

The operational theory of change observed in this curricular project had two main components. Change was dependent on the persuasive ability of the Project Director and those hired as consultants or sub-project directors, and changed practices were effected by appealing to the dedication of teachers and administrators. THE MAJOR REWARD TO TEACHERS FOR PARTICIPATION WAS A PERSONAL SENSE OF SATISFACTION WITH POSSIBLE IMPROVED INSTRUCTIONAL PERFORMANCE.

CHANGE WAS LARGELY PERCEIVED IN TERMS OF BETTER WAYS OF DEVELOPING LEARNING SKILLS AND MORE EFFICIENT REALIZATION OF TRADITIONAL SUBJECT MATTER GOALS. Most emphasis of the sub-project was placed on the skill level; that is, in language skills and in mathematics; and it seemed not to occur to anyone to deal with more complex intellectual tasks. The concept of change did not include questioning of existing educational goals; no serious consideration of adding new instructional areas nor deleting existing ones.

THE MOST SUCCESSFUL PROJECTS WERE STRONGLY BASED ON EXTENSIVE USE OF INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS SUCH AS TAPE RECORDERS, CALCULATORS, PAPERBACKS, AND CONVENTIONAL MATERIALS USED IN MORE INTENSIVE WAYS. Elementary teachers seeme more active and more responsive than did secondary ones. There was much talk in description of sub-projects about teaching methods emphasizing high positiv reinforcement as a way of bringing about change, but pupils appeared to take little notice of it.

OFTEN IT APPEARED THAT THE EFFORTS APPLIED TO SUB-PROJECTS MADE A MINIMAL CONTRIBUTION BECAUSE THE OUTSIDE HELP, IN THE FORM OF SUPERVISION, EQUIPMENT, AND ASSISTANCE WITH PLANNING, DID NOT CONTINUE LONG ENOUGH FOR THE PROPOSED ACTIVITY TO BECOME A CONTINUING PART OF THE SCHOOL.

There was an apparent absence of overall curriculum design in the Project and of priorities for improvement in the participating school districts. THERE EXISTED A LACK OF AWARENESS OF THE NEED FOR A CURRICULUM DESIGN.

In attempts to bring about change, there was an absence of controversial projects except for the Parent Opinion Survey and the Preliminary Curriculum Assessment. The characteristics in these two activities that seemed to stimulate controversy was that various groups of people made evaluative statements about school and these were collected and presented.

In activating projects two approaches were used. Early in the Project there was an attempt to treat all districts alike. That is, if a sub-project idea was approved, there were offers to introduce the activity in at least one building of each of the schools participating. With this practice, it became apparent that: a) time, effort, and money were being spent on teachers who were low in enthusiasm; b) reluctant individuals were a liability during the planning, development, and implementation phases, and c) the districts were often dissimilar and were not always able to utilize the same kind of treatment. This stimulated the development of a second approach which was to encourage a specific teacher or group of teachers who were enthusiastic about a particular topic or activity, regardless of whether or not they represented all districts. This approach also seemed to have its limitations in that: a) it often provided a rather narrow focus for the Project, b) the

competencies of resource persons were inadequately used, and c) it resulted in a rather high administrative cost of the Project. HOWEVER, ENTHUSIASTIC TEACHERS WHO DID PARTICIPATE WERE OFTEN MUCH MORE SUCCESSFUL AND PRODUCTIVE.

Cues With Reference to Sources of Ideas

IT IS ALWAYS DIFFICULT TO ASSIGN A SOURCE TO AN IDEA. ORIGINAL IDEAS ARE RARE AND CHANNELS OF COMMUNICATION AMONG PEOPLE ARE SO NUMEROUS THAT IT IS DIFFICULT TO ASSIGN SOURCES TO THE IDEAS OF THE PROJECT THAT WERE CONSIDERED THAT WERE ACCEPTED AND ACTED UPON, AND THAT WERE REJECTED. No one seemed certain when asked to identify the source of an idea, but there were several tentative sources suggested for the same concept. Regardless of the source, the first formal step toward the acceptance or rejection of an idea occurred when the Project Director presented it to the advisory board of superintendents. Attempts to be more precise than this has only produced evidence that the evaluators place little confidence in the procedures used to identify the sources of ideas.

Cues With Reference to Reasons for Participation

Even though the overall Project provided funds for consultant services, some help with instructional materials, and provided some of the administrative services, still (as indicated above) the decision to participate involved a personal cost to the teachers and administrators who would become directly involved. THERE WAS NEVER A SITUATION IN WHICH A PERSON HAD LESS WORK TO DO BECAUSE HE AGREED TO PARTICIPATE. The decision to participate on the district level was usually made by the superintendents and each seemed to base his decision on the judgments concerning the worth of the activity to his district, the personnel available to participate in the sub-project, and his anticipation of the community reaction to it. On two or three occasions the

decision not to participate was made by a local board. Again, as indicated above, the principals were often not able to make their own decisions about involvement. Teacher participation seemed to result from a positive working together of all administrative and professional levels of school personnel, plus the judged appropriateness of the sub-project activity.

Cues With Reference to Innovation and Exemplary Nature

AS A RESULT OF THE PROJECT'S ACTIVITIES THERE SEEMED TO BE A GREATER OPENNESS IN THE CLIMATE OF MANY SCHOOLS AND AN INCREASED VERBAL SOPHISTICATION ABOUT CURRICULUM EXHIBITED BY ADMINISTRATORS AND TEACHERS. For several it had stimulated an increased desire to more closely examine current practice and a greater awareness of need for possible improvement in instructional methods and content. It appears that teachers have become so skilled in techniques learned through sub-projects that they will continue to practice them and there are cases in some districts where art supervisors and reading teachers have been added to faculties.

During the three years of operation, the activities of the East-Central Curriculum Improvement Project varied from significant to limited success, and lessons were learned from all of them. If the same persons had similar opportunities again, they would conduct the Project more successfully. A high risk of failure accompanies undertaking a task for the first time, but the incidence of complete failure was low. Most of the approximately 250 persons who invested a part of their lives in the Project judge it to have been worthwhile. The significance of establishing a framework from which to draw cues to curricular change must not be overlooked. The grounding principle[7] must have transfer to examinations of curriculum projects.

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